

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 16, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write in strong support of your recent moves to reverse many of the Trump Administration's cruel and misguided policies against the Cuban people and to renew mutually beneficial engagement that will better support Cubans and Cuban-Americans while advancing both U.S. values and national security interests. We agree with your administration's approach that seeks to "address the humanitarian situation and to respond to the needs of the Cuban people"¹. Your policy changes announced last month — including expanding authorization for flights to airports other than Havana, restarting the Cuban Family Reunification Parole (CFRP) Program, and increasing support for entrepreneurs, educational travel, and remittances — are important initial steps, and are in line with policy changes sought by a strong majority of House Democrats in letters sent to you in March and December 2021. We are particularly grateful for your administration's recognition of the crucial role that donative remittances can play for the well-being of Afro-Cubans, of which only one in six currently receive family remittances.

As our nation and the world continue to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask you to explore possibilities for engaging with Cuba on issues of global health. As an initial step, we ask that you review U.S. policy towards Cuba in order to facilitate greater global vaccine equity, with a particular focus on ensuring that U.S. sanctions do not impede current or future efforts by Cuba to share COVID-19 vaccines and related technology and medical support with low-income countries around the world.

The emergence of recent variants exposed the shortcomings of global public health mechanisms in vaccinating the world's population equitably. While over 75 percent of people in high-income countries have received at least one dose, only 10 percent of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose². Experts are predicting a worldwide vaccine shortage of three billion doses this year alone, the brunt of which will fall on people in the Global South,

¹ "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on New Cuba Policy." The White House. The United States Government, May 17, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/05/17/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-on-new-cuba-policy/>.

² "A World Bank Group Flagship Report January 2022 Global Economic Prospects." Accessed May 11, 2022. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36519/9781464817601.pdf>.

particularly in Africa.³ Inequities in the distribution of vaccines, dubbed “vaccine apartheid” by public health experts, could lead to the rise of new, potentially deadlier or even more transmissible, variants of the coronavirus.

Your administration recognized the urgency of this issue in announcing support for the waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines, stating that your “aim is to get as many safe and effective vaccines to as many people as fast as possible” by “working with the private sector and all possible partners – to expand vaccine manufacturing and distribution” for the world.⁴ U.S. sanctions on Cuba directly impede these goals, not only by harming the country’s ability to vaccinate its own population but also by placing obstacles in the way of Cuba’s ability to produce and distribute its vaccine to other countries that continue to face shortages.⁵

In spite of these challenges, Cuba has now managed to achieve the fourth highest rate of vaccination worldwide.⁶ Cuba’s tremendous progress in vaccinating its population resulted in large part from its biotechnology sector’s successful development of five different Covid vaccines to date. While Cuba has developed five vaccines, it has primarily used three of them to vaccinate over 90 percent of the island’s population. Clinical trials in both adult and pediatric populations show that the vaccines are very effective, providing nearly 90% protection against symptomatic Covid when administered in three doses⁷. It is important to note that the World Health Organization (WHO) vaccine review process with regard to the Cuban-developed vaccines is not public at the moment and Cuba’s vaccine clinical trial data has yet to undergo international scientific peer review. However, Cuba and the WHO have met twice to begin the Emergency Use Listing process, and the efficacy of these vaccines has been further demonstrated by sharp declines in COVID-19 cases and deaths in Cuba since the vaccination campaign.

Experts believe that these vaccines hold enormous potential for other low-income countries. Unlike with the mRNA vaccines available in the United States, the Cuban vaccines are inexpensive to produce, less challenging to manufacture at scale, and do not require deep freezing. Cuba recently announced an ambitious plan to produce and distribute 200 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines at significantly reduced cost to low-income countries, including technology transfers for local vaccine production where possible, as well as medical brigades to build capacity for vaccine distribution where needed. During the Obama-Biden administration,

³ “‘Vaccine Apartheid’ Risks Rising Global Shortages in 2022 | Best ...” Accessed May 11, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2022-01-04/vaccine-apartheid-risks-rising-global-shortages-in-2022>.

⁴ “Statement from Ambassador Katherine Tai on the Covid-19 Trips Waiver.” United States Trade Representative. Accessed May 11, 2022. <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2021/may/statement-ambassador-katherine-tai-covid-19-trips-waiver#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20is%20a%20global%20health,protections%20for%20COVID%2D19%20vaccines>.

⁵ “Right to Live without a Blockade - Oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com.” Accessed May 11, 2022. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621191/bp-cuba-blockade-women-250521-summ-en.pdf>.

⁶ Holder, Josh. “Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations around the World.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 29, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>.

⁷ Meredith, Sam. “Why Cuba’s Extraordinary Covid Vaccine Success Could Provide the Best Hope for Low-Income Countries.” CNBC. CNBC, January 13, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/13/why-cubas-extraordinary-covid-vaccine-success-could-provide-the-best-hope-for-the-global-south.html>.

the U.S. and Cuba collaborated to confront the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. In 2016, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cuba's Ministry of Health which opened the doors for a brief period of collaboration and coordination on public health issues, communicable and non-communicable disease, and other aspects of medical research and development⁸. Cuba's goal of vaccinating people in low-income countries offers an important opportunity and bridge for our nations to work together once again on urgent health care issues facing the world.

Accordingly, we urge your Administration to conduct a review of U.S. policy toward Cuba and take appropriate executive action to ensure that basic medical supplies and components for producing and distributing vaccines are not negatively affected by the U.S. embargo. These changes should include reinstating the Obama-Biden administration policy that removed Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, which restricts and intimidates financial institutions from allowing transactions related to medical equipment; conducting a review of existing regulations interfering with medical, biotech and pharmaceutical collaboration; considering actions that may be taken through regulatory review or executive action to remove existing barriers to medical collaboration; rescinding policies that aim to incentivize Cuban doctors to abandon their medical missions, and adding Cuban vaccines to the list of vaccines recognized by U.S. authorities — as it has done with the Canadian vaccine Medicargo — for the purpose of allowing Cubans to come to the United States.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress




Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

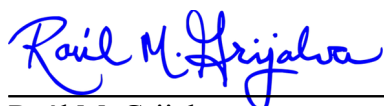
⁸ Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Health ... - Hhs.gov." Accessed June 10, 2022.
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-minsap-mou.pdf>.



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



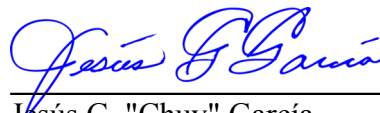
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



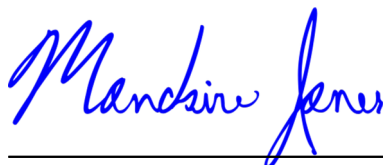
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



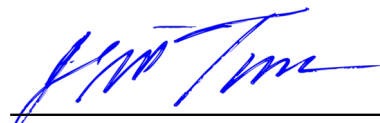
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress



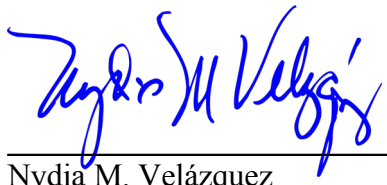
David J. Trone
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

André Carson

André Carson
Member of Congress